On loneliness, in connection.

Laura Macchini - 2nd trimester essay draft

> The idealist sees planet Earth converging. Computer networks foster virtual
> communities that cut across geographies and time zones. Virtual communities seem
> to heal isolated people locked in metal boxes on urban freeways. Through computer
> networks, the population can socialize while shopping, learning, and business are
> only a mouse click away. The telephone and the television seem to have been mere
> beginnings of a more powerful, multi-sensory, interactive telepresence. "Virtual
> communities" recall McLuhan's "global village" and Teilhard's "Omega Point."

With these words Michael Heim opens his paper "Virtual Realism" in 1998, it was
thirteen years ago; Facebook would have us believe that this has really happened, that
"through computer networks the population can socialize while shopping, learning and
business are only a mouse click away".
We are indeed all connected, and if not, social networks persistently suggest us to
import and synchronize contacts "connect with friends", Facebook, Twitter and most
platforms use the word "friend", but are these people we are connected to ultimately
our friends?
This essay argues the consequences of Internet and Anytime Anywhere Media to our social
interactions, the urge that results to participate at every cost, and if that makes us,
in conclusion, lonelier.

During this time, [the 90s] communication technologies in the home not only became more
abundant, they also became more individualized. For the first time in American history
many school-age children gained access to their own television, phone line, gaming
console, and music media, turning their bedrooms and playrooms into an oasis of media,
entertainment, and private leisure.
[S. Craig, The Young and the Digital - Beacon Press, October 2009]

Internet communication **is** (at least physically) a solitary activity - as the book has
been after centuries of oral production - we find ourselves isolated from the
surroundings, our eyes fixed on a screen, completely immersed in a world that unfolds
somewhere else.
The popularity of Email and Instant Messaging services, especially among young people,
resulted in a sudden urge of connection - as Samuel Craig puts it "staying connected to
peers is paramount". Online services and platforms facilitate the opportunity to
develop strong, persistent, real-time ties (with both already existent and new
acquaintances).
* why is this allowing shy people to have a conversation they would not have face-to-
face, and worsening their shyness at the same time.

* how this kind of communication helps teenagers to shape their personality
* for young people digital technologies are primary mediations of human-to-human connections.

“As social networks proliferate, they are changing the way people think about the Internet, from a tool used in solitary anonymity to a medium that touches on questions about human nature and identity: who we are, how we feel about ourselves, and how we act toward one another.”
[Scientific American Mind Jan-Feb 2010]

“Absence in Presence” is what Sherry Turkle defines as the activity of being connected with your phone (or other device) while among people: you divide your attention between your online connections and who is physically next to you.
* why multitasking is a typical trait of so called “digital natives”
“Subtly, over time, multitasking, once seen as something of a blight, was recast as a virtue” … “Experts went so far as to declare multitasking not just a skill but *the* crucial skill for successful work and learning in digital culture”
Multitasking is also psychologically rewarding: our body perceives the chemical pleasure of beginning something, and “the high deceives multitaskers into thinking they are being expecially productive”.
This approach to social relationships results in distributing our attention between numerous peers, beginning but not finishing conversations, in other words *caring less for each*.
On the other hand Internet connectivitiy (or even text messages) frees us from the boundaries of physical space: I can choose more carefully who to communicate with because physical presence is not required anymore. It allows to pick carefully who to confide in, or even confess anonymously to strangers, who one will never be forced to see face-to-face.

The technology and the society compel us to be faster and connected at any time (it's the price of freeing ourselves from the physical boundaries)
* a futurist's dream
* collapse of the distance between leisure and labour
The pressure of the perpetual communication shapes our language: in order to be faster and “keep up” with the questions, we answer quickly, we want to be concise, straight-forward.
“New technologies allow us to ‘*dial down*’ human contact, to titrate its nature and extent”
This kind of communication, explains Sherry Turkle, is not fit for a profound dialogue, for the complexity of human feelings; if online in the social networks, and in our

emails and text messages we are flattened in profiles and online personas "[...] we communicate in ways that ask for almost instantaneous responses, we don't allow sufficient space to consider complicated problems".
* does this make us less human?

Anytime anywhere media are *always there* waiting to be wanted "people lose a sense of choosing to communicate", this grows into an urge to share feelings at any cost, in order to give them a sense of materiality (in order to make them real, tangible)
[verba volant, scripta manent]
* hyper-other-directedness
* teenagers that have to share their feelings and experiences with friends in order for them to be aknowledged by someone, and thus make them real.

[Technology redraws the boundaries between intimacy and solitude]

todo:
* Scientific American Mind Jan Feb 2010- loneliness as potentially amplified by online communication
* privacy concerns on "sharing feeling at any cost"
* online narcissism and the pleasure of being watched